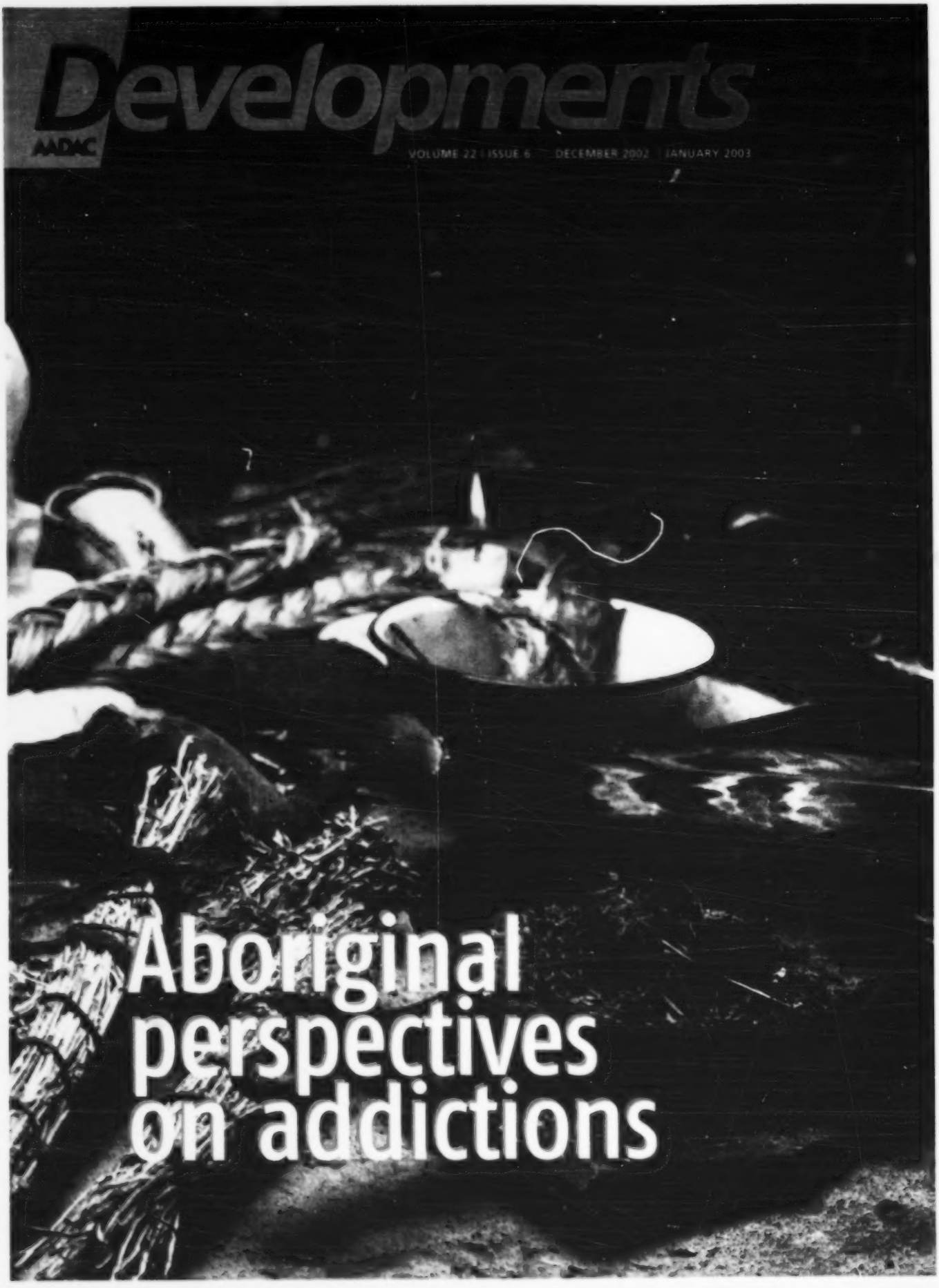
AADAC

Developments

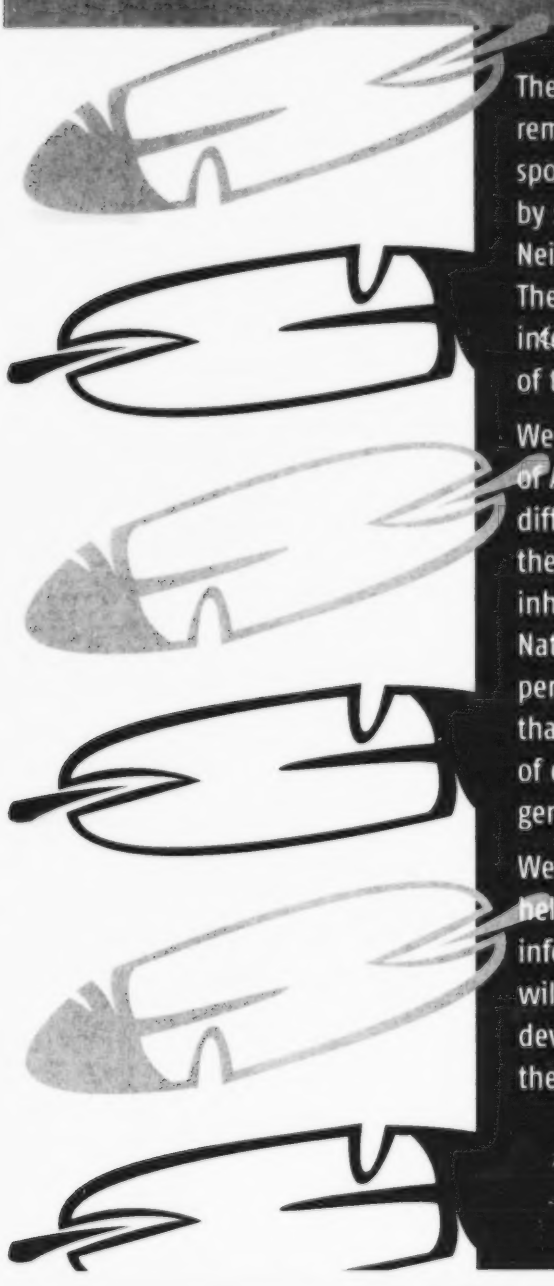
VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 6 DECEMBER 2002 | JANUARY 2003



Aboriginal perspectives on addictions

When an issue of *Developments* with an Aboriginal focus was first proposed, the AADAC Aboriginal Committee told us, "Start with the community. And you start with the community by talking to the people."

This issue, therefore, features the words of three Aboriginal people from northern and southern Alberta and beyond. They have lived on reserves, on Métis settlements and in the city. Their stories often echoed similar themes that reflect the experiences of many though not all Aboriginal people: Each spoke about the importance of culture, in particular the importance of spirituality in Aboriginal culture. All three talked about the effects of residential schools – church-run boarding schools apart from Aboriginal communities – on their cultures. Each spoke with hope for the youth and the elders, the traditional and the new.



The editors have sought to treat these words with respect, remembering at the same time that the people we interviewed spoke as individuals: they frequently prefaced their remarks by saying, I cannot speak for the whole Aboriginal community. Neither do they speak to express the views of the Commission. They speak their own stories and Developments has chosen the interview format to honour the verbal story-telling traditions of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

We cannot pretend, in three pages, to reflect the diversity of Aboriginal people in the province of Alberta. There are differences from one language group to another, from the north to the south, from Status to non-Status, from rural inhabitants to city- and town-dwellers, from Métis to First Nations. And, of course, each person has his or her own perspective. As you read the stories that follow, we caution that each story reflects the experience, knowledge and insights of one person, and that these cannot be extrapolated to generically reflect "Aboriginal experience."

We hope only that reading these three conversations will help those not familiar with Aboriginal culture to develop an informed and meaningful sensitivity, and that that sensitivity will lead to open dialogue, which cannot but contribute to developing appropriate, caring and workable solutions to the problems of addiction in Aboriginal cultures.

Audrey J. Whitson and Deirdre Ah Shene, Editors

Aboriginal teachings and tobacco

Interview by Audrey J. Whitson

ELSIE PAUL was born on the now-dissolved Wolf Lake Métis settlement and grew up on Saddle Lake Reserve. Elsie now lives on another Métis settlement called Kikino, which means "our home" in Cree. She acknowledges both of her cultures, Cree First Nations and Métis. Elsie helped facilitate the Aboriginal Tobacco Use Strategy Consultation for AADAC in northern Alberta.

AJW: How was tobacco used when you were growing up?

EP: Tobacco was widely used by everyone in the family and I started smoking when I was eight years old. My mother or grandpa would say, "Go light the cigarette for me." When my grandpa passed away just before I turned 16, I was already addicted [to nicotine].

Early teachings are so important. If they're taught very consistently and strongly, they stick with you. If you teach about the sacredness of tobacco, that's going to show.

AJW: When did you learn the sacred teaching about tobacco?

EP: It wasn't taught in my home, because both my mom and dad come from residential school. I was not involved in the culture, even though I lived on a reserve. Thank God I learned about it later on.

In 1977, I sobered up and I got totally immersed in First Nations dancing. I began to learn about the music and the spirituality — the sweats and the medicine people, the pipe ceremonies and the sweat lodges.

I had a dream that I had this elder (it was an old man). His head started coming out of the ground. I was looking at him and all of a sudden, I went and I took a box and I covered his head with it and I sat on it. It bothered me. What does that mean, I'm so disrespectful! The dream gave me the teaching that I was afraid of the spirituality and that I shouldn't be.

I learned about the sacredness of tobacco in my recovery. The real elders, they don't use it for addictive purposes. They use it for spiritual purposes. The real elders may smoke it but they don't inhale it.

Now my grandpa told us, long time ago, only the shamans or the medicine people smoked. They didn't even inhale the smoke. I know one elder who doesn't smoke. She does pipe ceremonies but she doesn't inhale that. You see, we have some elders that smoke all the time. If you teach children the spiritual use of tobacco, they're not going to use that in an addictive way.

AJW: What would that spiritual use be?

EP: They use it in offerings. So, when you take sage or sweet grass from Mother Earth, you offer the tobacco. You say a prayer and you give thanks to the Creator. In the sweat lodges, they also give the tobacco offering because that smoke sends your prayers to the Creator and speaks your prayers to the Creator.

I quit smoking 25 years ago. I was addicted for so many years. Smoking made me feel good, gave me a sense of belonging. Same thing with alcohol and drugs. They made me feel who I wanted to be but couldn't be at that time.

When we were doing consultations up north, the further north we'd go, it's just like I was before. Some of them acknowledge there's a problem but many of them think it's okay because everybody does it.

They talked about how some kids, like the boys five years old, are chewing tobacco. For some of them, the parents say it's okay. There is a lot of young people smoking. I think it's the responsibility of the parents but it's also the responsibility of the elders to really go in and teach the dangers. We all need to be involved.

I think sometimes our elders become so overwhelmed because the kids don't have respect any more. I think that we need to consistently work with that. You have to build that rapport, be a role model. You have to provide a belief system. Because of cultural losses and family breakdowns, our kids lose the respect and the TV and the video games become the parent. Kids need to be involved, to feel and listen and see. That's the traditional way of teaching.

I would love to be in those workshops talking about tobacco but talking and complementing more in a cultural way. It could work now if we teach our very young right now about the effects of tobacco, try to instil in them that smoking is acceptable only for sacred purposes.

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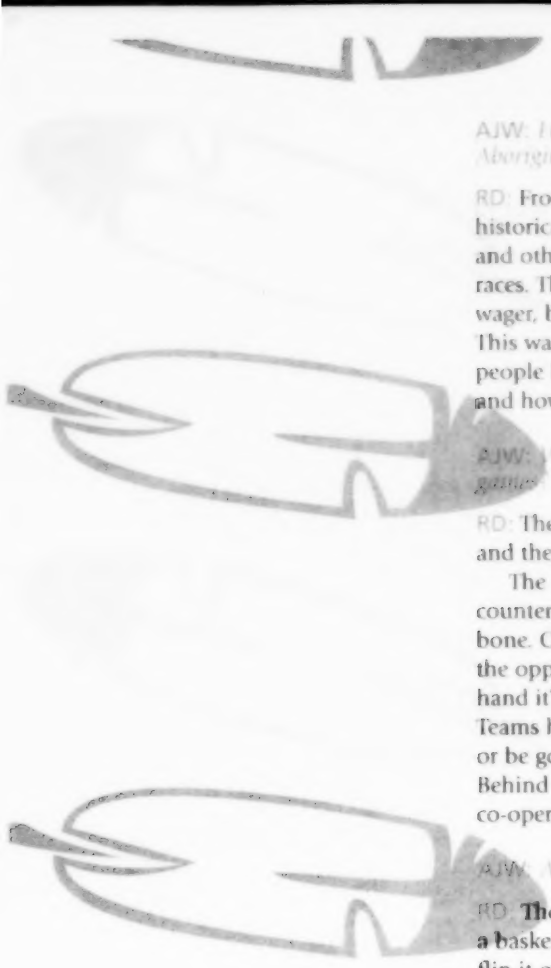

Gaming and Aboriginal culture

Ray Delorme, interviewed by Audrey J. Whitson

RAY DELORME has been an addictions counsellor with Poundmaker's Lodge in St. Albert for the past 17 years. He comes from Cochin (Jack Fish Lake) Plains Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan.

AJW: *How is gambling part of Aboriginal culture and tradition?*

RD: From the research I've done, it's historical. There were hand games and other games too, foot races, horse races. There may have been a small wager, but it wasn't gambling as such. This was part of training because people had to learn how to be fast and how to be good at riding.

AJW: *What kind of skills for the hand games?*

RD: The men played the hand games and the women had stone games.

The men's hand games use two counters, stones or pieces of wood or bone. One team hides the stone and the opposition has to guess which hand it's in. They guess two at a time. Teams have to get together to guess or be good at hiding the objects. Behind it, there's a lesson and that's co-operation and sharing.

AJW: *And the women's stone games?*

RD: They would have the stones in a basket and they'd shake it and just flip it over. Each team would try to guess where the stones would fall. It was a way to entertain themselves while they discussed family problems or different ways of doing things; maybe someone discovered a new way of sewing hide, a different design for moccasins, a different way of cooking meat. But they could spend hours just laughing. The point was not in winning. The point was that the women came together.

AJW: *When did gambling become part of the game?*

RD: The monetary came in about the late sixties, early seventies. People had more money then. Even with the hand games—the players don't gamble, the people on the outside wager.

Then bingo came into the community. The Church brought that in the sixties or early seventies. The old people would play for Christmas hampers and stuff like that. When the Church started small cash prizes, more people went. The problem didn't really escalate until alcohol came into our community in the early sixties. Later, a lot of people quit drinking and got more into the bingo. It really got worse when the casino opened up and VLTs.

I see this at Poundmaker's: Natives gamble up everything but they don't see that as a problem. They'll say it's traditional. Some people it's, "Yeah, I have a gambling problem but what else do I got to do?" This is where communities need to be involved.

AJW: *So, what kind of community involvement do you think is needed?*

RD: They need to find something for people to do outside of gambling and drinking and using drugs. Could be woman's sewing circles or GA [Gamblers Anonymous] meetings or any other [addictions] programs.

Something's missing in our society. We've lost contact with reality and that's spirituality. We've lost contact with ourselves. We're too busy trying to better the Joneses. We haven't got time to be friends any more.

AJW: *Why is that?*

RD: You can't visit because the people you want to visit may be gone or else it interferes with your plans. When I go back to Saskatchewan to visit, I have to go to the casino to find my family. I've better things to do than that. I think the only time we've really been together is at funerals and that's the sad part of reality. People haven't got time anymore. Something happened.

AJW: *What happened?*

RD: Mistrust, and that happened because of alcoholism and the drug addictions. Now it's happening because of gambling. I guess that's a lot of shame and guilt to go along with that. Somewhere down the line, we've lost our way. I feel a lot of it has to do with residential schools. My grandparents lost the ability to be parents because they were never taught that, and that's transferred on to the other generations. People lost the ability to share, to love.

Culture and recovery

An understanding of Aboriginal culture can make for more effective counselling

Quinton Crow Shoe, interviewed by Dick Peterson, Supervisor, AADAC Crowsnest Pass Area Office

QUINTON CROW SHOE is program coordinator for the Napi Friendship Centre in Pincher Creek. His grandfather was Joe Crow Shoe, a highly respected elder and leader from the Piikani Nation in Southern Alberta.

DP: *You've been working with youth for several years now. Why do you think it's important to focus on helping youth?*

QC: Between 60 and 70 per cent of our membership on the reserve out in Brocket are youth 30 and under. A lot are under 18.

The values of young people have really changed. We used to have to get creative in what we'd do. If we were bored, we'd just go outside and do something. But now they've got everything at their fingertips, computers, video games, TV, the remote control, the stereo. We're competing with technology, coupled with the fact that these guys have too much time on their hands. They go to school but we haven't had success in pumping out graduates. In Grade 10, 11, they get into a relationship. The girl gets pregnant. The guy quits school or whatever. A lot of these people have addictions problems too.

DP: *What are some of the things that counsellors have to learn to help them understand Aboriginal culture?*

QC: Time is not of the essence. When the Creator is ready for you or when you're ready to give your prayers, time is not important. It's the same in ceremonies. Because a lot of our people are used to that and because 80 per cent of the people are unemployed, time is really not of the essence. But you go outside the parameters of the reserve and everything is by time.

DP: *What advice would you have for those of us who see Aboriginal people in our practice?*

QC: Out in Brocket, one of the things that the school board put in the teachers' contracts was that as soon as you're hired, you have to take Native American Studies 1000. Get that course because that course gave you a very good knowledge on what Native life is like.

Try to understand the culture, the values and the beliefs. Any chance you get to learn a Blackfoot word or phrase, learn it so that doors open. When a Native person sits down and somebody just out of the blue says, "Hello. How are you doing?" in Blackfoot, the Native person is going to really take to that person. Doors open as soon as you take that concerted effort.

That's how I did it, in reverse. I was living on the reserve and I had to work in town and my first couple of years were a culture shock but now I feel comfortable going into any business, any public facility, talking to anybody, human to human. My grandfather always used say, "When you have that gift of balance, you know you can walk in the White Man's world and you can succeed but you also have your foundation; you have your values, your traditions, your beliefs, your customs." A lot of our people, they don't have that pride, they don't have that self-esteem. They didn't have that opportunity of having an elder teach them the ways or the values or the beliefs.

Once people start going back to traditional values and beliefs, suddenly they have a purpose. They go into mainstream society, and they have a different outlook. They come to Pincher Creek and instead of going to the bar or to bingo, they say hey, I wonder where I can get a job or where I can start my path on going back to school. Those types of things just automatically start coming to their mind. They go back to the reserve and they say, Gee, I wonder where there's an elder I can go to talk to. I'm curious about who my ancestors are or I'm curious how to hold the pipe in a sweat lodge.

DP: *A lot of people on the reserve don't know that.*

QC: They didn't have that in their upbringing because in the residential schools, it was forbidden to say anything in Blackfoot or to talk about your cultural ways or your values and a lot of our older people were turned Christian and the Blackfoot ways were secondary. They were shown structure, the White Man's world. It was forced on them. Their language and cultural values and everything was taken away from them. They were told it was evil.

There's a transition of time in there after residential school where my parents, for instance, would rather speak English. But our clan was lucky. Our grandfather made sure that everything was the Indian way, Blackfoot. A lot of people did not have that. In the meantime, addictions and alcohol were introduced to our community; welfare dependency was introduced to our community. We were at a total loss. For 50 to 60 years, we've been playing catch-up.

There's still corruption within reserves, nepotism, and that's all a spin-off, the ripple effect. But our younger people are getting educated and starting to take key positions. Once the new generation takes over the leadership and the roles of the technical people and the managers, we'll see a massive change. At the same time, there's a really scary thought that our culture's going to be low priority because everybody's too busy learning computers, learning management, learning how the world works and the balance gets taken away. So my advice would be to really emphasize the cultural values and traditions, and educate the key people—the educators, the counsellors, the social workers, so that everybody understands where we came from, who we are now and what we need to be.

AADAC
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
An Agency of the Government of Alberta

Developments
Canadian
Publications Mail
Product Sales Agreement
No. 40062405

VISION

A healthy society that is free from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs and gambling

MISSION

Making a difference in people's lives by assisting Albertans to achieve freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs and gambling

VALUES

We value people, treat them with respect and believe in their ability to succeed.

We value individuals, families and communities as partners in addressing addiction problems.

We value staff and their knowledge, skills, creativity, initiative, and expertise.

We value service delivery that is grounded in research and experience.

THE PURPOSE OF DEVELOPMENTS

To enhance allied professionals' knowledge and understanding of addictions issues. **Developments** is published six times a year and is circulated to 16,000 readers worldwide. Copyright© 2002 by AADAC. The opinions expressed by individual authors do not necessarily reflect those of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

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ISSN 0714-1017

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RESEARCH

Addictions Researchers of Alberta Established

Addictions research in Alberta has expanded with new funding opportunities, provincial and national research collaborations and in response to growing demand for science-based information to inform policy, programs and practice. There is much good work underway among Alberta-based addictions researchers. This was apparent when 19 researchers, affiliated with the Universities of Alberta, Calgary and Lethbridge or with AADAC, met in Calgary on September 12, 2002 to discuss addictions-related research programs, interests and projects.

The group circulated and discussed abstracts of their current research projects. The projects include client, community, and population-level studies. Social policy, community programs, clinical interventions, and program evaluations were encompassed in the range of addictions research addressed. Topics cover issues and problems associated with alcohol, illicit drugs, medications, tobacco, and gambling, such as substance abuse and concurrent disorders, chronic pain management, and addictions among youth, women, seniors, and Aboriginal communities.

The researchers are excited about addressing research gaps, enhancing collaborations and funding opportunities, and disseminating results of their studies to support addiction service practitioners.

The group decided to establish a formal network, the Addictions Researchers of Alberta (ARA). Plans include developing a database of Alberta-based addictions researchers and setting a follow-up meeting in 2003.

Look for reports on research activities and results in upcoming issues of *Developments*.

AADAC ON THE WEB

www.aadac.com is your portal to four AADAC Web sites, each with a different focus.

The Corporate site offers clear, concise fact sheets answering commonly asked questions on a variety of alcohol, other drug and gambling topics including

- addictions in the family
- fetal alcohol syndrome
- common drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, solvents and steroids
- problem gambling
- smoking, spit tobacco and secondhand smoke
- information about AADAC and its services

The Youth Web site offers engaging information for youth age 14 to 17 on alcohol, other drugs, gambling, personal development and recovery. Interactive features include surveys, quizzes, bulletin boards and forums showcasing youth views and talents. There is youth-oriented discussion of a variety of topics, including the definition of addiction, how alcohol affects the body, types of drugs and their effects, designer drugs, gambling facts and myths and AADAC's popular flyer "the truth about tobacco." The site offers tips and information to help youth understand themselves, manage peer pressure, and set and achieve goals.

The Kids Site, aimed at pre-teens offers similar interactive features and facts in a fun, easy-to-read format. It includes a Snakes and Ladders game, colouring pages and a tile game.

AADAC's Parents and Teachers site offers objective information about alcohol, drugs, tobacco and gambling to help parents and teachers encourage youth to stay free of substance abuse and gambling problems. A teacher information series provides classroom resources and information to help engage students in taking responsibility for their actions and making informed decisions. A parent information series answers frequently asked questions and gives parents information they can use to help kids make positive changes in their lives and prevent them from using alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling. The site also features information on peer support and resiliency.

Tobacco information is available on all sites and AADAC plans a separate site focusing on this topic in 2003.